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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JERUSALEM 001524

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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE, NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/WATERS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KWBG](#) [EAID](#) [PTER](#) [KDEM](#) [PREL](#)
SUBJECT: HAMAS REPLACES THREE GAZA MAYORS, PRESSURES OTHER
MUNICIPALITIES

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary. Hamas has taken control of three Gaza municipalities, replacing Fatah mayors and city council members. Gaza's other Fatah mayors report limited Hamas interference, but express concern about the agenda of Hamas' former Minister of Local Government. Gaza City's mayor described electrical shutdowns and brownouts that threaten pumping of drinking water and sewage, which could lead to serious public health problems. He said crime has increased since Hamas took control of the Gaza Strip. Gaza's five governorates continue to operate, but Hamas raids/harassment put the governors in a tenuous position. End summary.

Hamas Takes Over Rafah,
al-Burayj, Bayt Lahiya

12. (SBU) Gaza political contacts and Palestinian newspapers report that Hamas officials took control of three municipalities (Rafah, al-Burayj Camp and Bayt Lahiya) July 18-19. Hamas claims to have won disputed municipal elections in these locations in May 2005. ConGen contacts report that Hamas official Issa al-Nashar (the Hamas candidate in the 2005 elections) has assumed office as Mayor of Rafah. Palestinian newspapers report that Hamas member Taha Abu Ayman has replaced Fatah mayor Samir Mattar in al-Burayj, and Hamas official Izz al-Din Dahnun has replaced Fayz Abu 'Aytah in Bayt Lahiya.

Fatah Mayors Hold, But Hamas
Enforces Its Work Week

13. (SBU) Mustafa al-Shawaf, Mayor of Abasan al-Kabira, told ConGen contacts and USAID employees that the town continues normal operations and provision of municipal services. He said Hamas Executive Force gunmen forcefully occupied a portion of the municipal building as a security headquarters, and refuse to leave, but do not otherwise interfere with city operations. Abasan al-Jadida Mayor Ra'uf Asfur told USAID employees that operations continue normally except for the Executive Force's enforcement of Hamas' work week orders. (Note: Hamas ordered a Saturday-Wednesday work week, conflicting with the PA government's designation of Sunday-Thursday. End note). He said the Executive Force earlier had prevented municipal workers from entering the Municipality on Thursdays angering city employees, who feared they would not be paid if they adopted a work week contrary to that ordered by the PA government.

Gaza City Mayor: "Walking a
Tightrope" with Hamas

¶4. (C) Gaza City Mayor Majid Abu Ramadan (Presidentially-appointed, as are all city council members) told PolOff on July 19 that he and all other non-Hamas mayors recognize PM Fayyad's Cabinet as the national authority, and do not report to the former Minister of Local Government (MoLG). (Note: Hamas controls 8 of 25 municipalities in the Gaza Strip. Most municipalities, including the two largest cities, Gaza City and Khan Yunis, have Fatah mayors who were appointed by Yasser Arafat and President Abbas and would participate in the fifth round of municipal elections. End note).

¶5. (C) Abu Ramadan said former MoLG Muhammad al-Barghuthi claims to still be the MoLG under Ismayil Haniyah and is a Hamas extremist looking to expand his power and pressuring mayors in smaller cities to resign. Abu Ramadan said Hamas has generally not interfered with Gaza City's municipal matters thus far, but the MoLG sent people to the Mayor's office to get information about his policies and future plans. Abu Ramadan said he and other Fatah mayors are "walking a tightrope" and must be careful not to surrender to Hamas control on one hand, but also to ensure essential services for residents.

Several Crises Looming in Gaza City;
Poverty Endemic, Salaries Unpaid

¶6. (C) Municipal workers continue to provide services for Gaza City's 600,000 residents, Abu Ramadan said, but unlike PA employees, who recently received salary payments, municipal workers have not received salaries for eight months and absenteeism is increasing. He said the PA has ceased revenue sharing and most Gaza City residents are too poor to

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pay their residential/commercial bills for essential services, leaving the city unable to pay its USD 1 million salary bill (he said this amount is equal to the combined monthly salary liability for all of Gaza's other municipalities). He identified salaries as the city's top need, explaining that if city workers strike for lack of salaries, garbage collection and infrastructure repairs will largely cease, compounding severe existing sanitation, sewage, water and electrical problems.

¶7. (C) Electrical shutdowns and brownouts have cut down on operation of pumping stations for drinking water and sewage, he said, requiring use of reserve heating oil supplies, which are nearing exhaustion, to power the pumps. He said he fears a serious outbreak of water-borne diseases such as cholera and health problems from uncollected garbage and release of untreated sewage if electrical and fuel shortages are not corrected soon. He asked for continued USAID assistance to avert a crisis and meet residents' needs. Abu Ramadan said he is concerned about the Hamas Executive Force's recent arrest of the director-general of Gaza Electrical Company (whose largest shareholder is the Gaza City municipality), fearing this could further complicate efforts to restore normal power supplies.

Hamas Failing on Law/Order

¶8. (C) Contrary to media reports, Mayor Abu Ramadan said crime has increased since Hamas took control of the Gaza Strip. He said the Executive Force is the main law enforcement body, because most of the police are not reporting for work, but the Executive Force is failing to prevent crime or apprehend perpetrators. He said there is more looting and property crime than one month ago, and poverty is leading many Gazans to petty theft. He said thefts from government buildings have been especially common in the past three weeks, but residential break-ins are also a major problem.

Gaza Governors Tenuously Remain

19. (SBU) According to Gaza contacts and press reports, the Executive Force has entered Gaza Governor Muhammad al-Qidwa's Gaza City offices on multiple occasions, confiscating some Governorate property and detaining staff for questioning. Nevertheless, Gaza's five governors remain in office. These governors were all appointed by President Abbas or Yassir Arafat. ConGen contacts note that the governors are being monitored closely by the Executive Force.

WALLES